

University of South Carolina Scholar Commons

Theses and Dissertations

2014

The Definition of Youth

Jessta Noel

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd>

Recommended Citation

Noel, J.(2014). *The Definition of Youth*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd/2730>

This Open Access Dissertation is brought to you by Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact dillarda@mailbox.sc.edu.

The Definition of Youth

By

Jessi Noel

Bachelors of Arts in Theatre
Jacksonville State University, 2010

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Masters of Fine Arts in

Acting

Arts College

University of South Carolina

2013

Accepted by:

Steve Pearson, Major Professor

Robyn Hunt, Committee Member

Richard Jennings, Committee Member

Lacy Ford, Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

© Copyright by Jessi Noel, 2013

All Rights Reserved

DEDICATION

Dedicated to the definition of a strong woman, Mom.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the education I have received and to Steve Pearson and Robyn for seeing something others overlooked. Thank you to my parents and every family member that has watched me grow up. Thanks be to God forever and ever. Amen.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was to write my own theatrical production which would solely include me as the actor. I drew upon my experience of childhood growing up in Atlanta, GA as well as the stories passed on in my family.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
ABSTRACT	v
MY THOUGHTS ON MY SCRIPT	1
THE SCRIPT: THE DEFINITION OF YOUTH.....	7
WORKS CITED	11

MY THOUGHTS ON MY SCRIPT

The “Solo Show”. Those words together in a sentence used to make my skin crawl. I was terrified about this when it was first explained to me in the interview with Steve and Robyn. I hadn’t even gotten accepted into the program before I decided it was something I was definitely going to fail miserably.

Surprisingly enough, this did not happen. I was rather successful at the “Solo Show” if I can be so proud and was shocked by how easy it came. Robyn guided us through the process like a cooking class. Now imagine a cooking class where everybody can cook and no one’s food tastes awful. The classroom was just like this. Everyone’s pieces were amazing. They all had color, flavor, and presentation. These are essentials in a good meal. Now that I’ve established that my classmates are great “cooks”, I have to comment on the ingredients I was encouraged to use. My family. Robyn encouraged me to use my family. Here I was trying to create something deep and meaningful out of thin air when Robyn steered me in a direction that was so natural and effortless.

Originally, I had a different show written. There’s no need to go into detail what I originally wrote because I would like to keep it a memory and not a script. But late one night I could not turn my mind off. I kept thinking of the tools

Robyn gave us in class and came to the realization that I was my biggest tool. I could pull from me. So that is just what I did.

The analysis on this piece will be personal. Why you may ask? Well, because I wrote it. No one needs to know who is who, or who I am speaking for. I like the mystery because I feel it accurately describes my family. The stories I have collected from childhood through adulthood could fill a novel, or should a say be a novel. My memories are as relevant to me as the color of my eyes. They're brown, not blind. They are what I use to see life. Having this mindset made me realize how proud I am of my culture, roots, background, heritage or whatever word one would like to use.

There are is a particular subject I think is important to discuss before anyone reads this script or reads it and assumes they get it, and that is the beauty and innocence of childhood; the beauty of youth, of adolescence, or greenness of a person. This chapter of life is probably the most honest we will ever be. I want that to be understood.

I knew when I started creating this show that I had to only type what I was hearing in my head and what I was hearing was a conversation. I didn't want the conversation to be with an adult because adults can be demeaning and there was going to be none of that in this play. I also knew I didn't want it to be

with another child because there would never be any silence in the sense the other child would also have a lot to say, and if the other child didn't say anything back we would assume something was wrong and be distracted the whole time. I needed to have a conversation with someone that was going to listen without responding which in all honesty is the easiest conversation for a child to have. With this in mind, I chose a dog. What other companion can you think of that is as patient and attentive as a dog? Exactly.

The desire to be heard is what drives this piece. To stop and really listen has become harder and harder for me to do as an adult. You would think it would be easier now that I have taught myself to sit still when someone is talking but unfortunately the education and vocabulary I have gained over the years has only caused me to absentmindedly block out what the other person is saying and wait for my turn to speak. I mean let's just be real. You don't do this you say? Well, you're lying.

Adults always assume a child never hears anything or that their age has something to do with their ability to process. This is stupid. Feeling is feeling and doesn't take a PH.D to recognize when something hurts your feelings or makes you feel ten feet tall. Children relish in this freedom and adults do not. They have a way of being unapologetic about their reactions or lack thereof. I miss

being that way. I understand some did not grow up with this type of free expression and that is something I greatly appreciate about my mother. I was allowed to say my thoughts out loud. This doesn't mean I never gotten in trouble about was said, but she encouraged me to learn to communicate. She never wanted me to be in a position where I let someone take of advantage of me because I was scared to speak. Surprisingly, even with this freedom, I was still a pretty quiet kid. I guess if I was allowed to share my thoughts I only wanted to share the important ones.

I desperately wanted to be a dancer when I was young. This hasn't changed. One day on our way to school my mother asked me what I wanted to do, sing like Whitney Houston or dance like Janet Jackson. I took a minute to respond. I watched the cars and scenery pass by while I looked out the passenger seat window and finally spoke through the silence, "dance like Janet Jackson." This decision was bigger than anything in my world at that time. I wasn't immediately enrolled in all the dance classes in Clayton County but that didn't matter. Her asking me was enough for me to feel I could out dance Madonna and Janet at the same time on their best day.

I wouldn't say this started my obsession with music but it did heighten it. We always had music playing in our house. We mainly listened to whatever

the adults listened to meaning nothing before the year 1975 usually. This would explain my obsession with Ray Charles. I loved my radio and spent countless hours with it in front of a mirror in the bathroom. The sink was my stage. Luckily I was small enough to fit in it without trouble. I would buy cassette tapes for my “performances” from thrift stores and flea markets. I am from the generation of the compact disc but for some reason I liked the way tapes felt. Rewinding and fast-forwarding really feels like you’re going somewhere with cassette tapes. The buttons on my radio had weight to them and I could push them and they obeyed my every command. I was the only maestro in my neighborhood. I had a lot of time to play by myself and it’s during this time I was committed to entertaining even if it was just for a party of one.

I hope the little insight that was given will give the reader and the audience a deeper understanding for this piece. I would enjoy performing it again. I’m not exactly sure when I would do it but I’m open to the opportunity. A fancy set would not be needed because I enjoy the simplicity of it. I would just need a book bag, a radio, and a stuffed animal puppy. I don’t want anything added. A bare stage represents more than I think people like to imagine and that’s what this piece is all about, the imagination of a child. My family is sewn all throughout this script. And just like a quilt, it might be mismatched and tethered but it will definitely keep you warm. I would not be the person I am

today without the successes and failures of those I watched growing up. I could create a play from every single memory if I wanted to. I respect the parts that are not my memories but the memories of others and do what I feel is my responsibility to keep them going. Besides, the first historians didn't write, they spoke, they performed. Isn't this what theatre is all about, telling the stories and memories of others so that they will never be forgotten? Although I can't predict the future of how long this memories will live, but I can continue to keep them living in my world and do my very best to hold true to what helped shape me. I pray that will speak louder than my words.

THE SCRIPT

The Definition of Youth

(Young girl sings “Georgia” by Ray Charles offstage in the dark as she slowly walks onto stage. Lights come up on young girl carrying a book bag on her back, a stuffed animal puppy in one hand, and radio in the other. She sits on the floor CENTER. She places Puppy Downstage of her. Her entire conversation is to her dog. Unzips book bag and takes out envelope.)

I think I’m gonna tell my teacher tomorrow that those times that she is catching me talk only happens when I really need something. Like paper or “what page are we on” I never talk any other time! They are always talkin to me. I can’t help if I just listen really well. If I’m fully engaged in listening. You listening? Yeah I definitely think I’m going talk to Ms. Adams tomorrow. She can’t keep sending these notes home.

(Puts envelope back in bag)

I used to be nervous. Like I never really wanted to talk but I guess that got old. Now I talk all the time. I can’t seem to stop talking. Is that annoying? Cause I can’t promise you I’m going to stop. Maybe that’s why you’re so quiet maybe I don’t give you enough time to speak or to think of what to say. You know that you can be looking someone dead in the eyes and not be listening to them. You think people can tell that you’re not listening to them? I mean even if you’re looking straight at them? I can tell. I can tell that what I’m saying isn’t reaching but a wrong number. Haha that’s funny cause they look they have is just so serious. Like they are really concentrating on what on the words that are coming

out of your mouth. And they whole time they are just giving you wrong number. This boy in library gave me his phone number today. What does that mean?

I was reading in the library about you. Well not you but the breed of you.

You know my mama don't like animals. She thinks they're cute until they use the bathroom on the floor. This is a stupid philosophy if you ask. (BEAT). Don't tell her I said stupid. I remember begged and begged her to get me a puppy and her excuse was "your cousins have enough dogs for all of us, you're always at Aunt Terry's house don't you play with dogs when you're there? I finally was able to get her to at least have a full conversation about the possibility of a puppy. I knew that it was getting close to Christmas so I decided she was just trying to surprise me. Finally the day before Christmas I decided it was time to announce my depression. There was no puppy to be found. But then it was Christmas day! Mom was already in the living room. And there next to her was a box with holes in it. There was a puppy in that box. I knew there was a puppy in that box. She knew there was a puppy in that box, that's why she was sitting in that way with that body language that screamed puppies being in boxes! I didn't know what to do so I just rubbed the box for a second. I took the lid off and there you were! You were a boy. I checked. Jumanji was my favorite movie at the time so that's why I named you that.

I'm Hungry.

If you could eat anything right now what would it be? Popeyes?! When have you had Popeyes? They do have really good mashed potatoes.

I have a story about Popeye's. Well Popeye's is in the story.

It's a story about a brother and a sister. They were left to take care of house. For a year. Without warning they mama just didn't come back from vacation. So the brother got a job as a janitor and the sister got a job at Popeye's chicken. They had to make money to keep the lights and water on. The sister brought left over chicken home from Popeye's every night. They got really creative with the recipes. Chicken noodle soup, Chicken tacos, chicken and rice, chicken and bread. At night she always got home before the brother. One night she walked home like usual and went inside and locked the door and she put the leftover

chicken in the fridge and went to the bathroom. While she was in there she thought she heard something. She crept out to go and see but it stopped. She heard it again. It was coming from the living room. She crawled on the floor in the hallway towards the living room...the noise was coming from the window. A man was trying to break in. She wanted to scream but that would have been stupid. So she stayed on the floor and cried. This is all happening while the brother is work. Out of nowhere he just didn't feel right. What He say? He felt far away. He got in the car and left and pulled up right in the yard, right in the grass, directly in front of house, and directly in front of the window. The sister couldn't see but she could hear... Never mind. It was before you were born.

Tomorrow is career day at school. Like when you can dress up for what you want to be when you grow up. How do famous people dress then? I figured I could change my outfits on the bathroom breaks. Oh and before recess. The only problem is I want to be famous but regular at the same time. So I'll just combine those two ideas. I'll probably start with this.

(She digs in book bag and takes out notepad and pencil. Stands there waiting for approval.)

Famous waitress! Like at waffle house! You know how in the movies the waitress is always trying become famous. Well this is a short cut.

Ok..Just listen..

(She digs though book bag again and takes out cassette tape and puts in radio. She pushes play and SOUND plays Janet Jackson "What have you done for me lately". She mimics the lyrics in the beginning and then tries her hardest to dance like Janet Jackson. She stops after a few seconds. Presses stop in radio.)

I could be her right? I'm the only one I know who can dance liker her. I mean I'll have to change the words around from "Ms. Jackson if you're nasty" to Ms. Noel if you're rude. It was between her and Madonna and decided Janet was the smarter choice. I know how to dance. You don't have to take classes to know how to dance.

My mama has this picture with Neil Armstrong holding her as a baby. Neil Armstrong went to space and then landed on the moon and then came back and

then was famous! It was before you were born. **(Takes out sticky note and marker and writes Neil Armstrong and sticks on shirt)**I don't have any space outfits so I figured I'll just write Neil Armstrong on my shirt and then look like I just came back from space.

(Stands and makes faces like she just came back from space)

Where do you think space ends and heaven starts? I'm guessing after Pluto, that's the farthest right?

You know what else I read about you in the library? It is hereditary for you to go blind...But that's ok Ray Charles is blind.

What makes a person blind? You ever get uncomfortable around blind people? Like they choose just not see you or something? What if that was the case? What if people choose to be blind? Would that be stupid? I guess it depends on your situation. You know the definition of situation? I looked it up once. It means- a set of circumstances in which one finds oneself. A state of affairs. The location and surroundings of a place. Situation sounds so permanent doesn't it?

(Looks up at sky.)

Are stars permanently in the sky? If I don't see them does that mean they're there? It's been so hard to see them in Atlanta lately.

Do you think I could be a star? Ray Charles is a star and he's blind...he can't even see stars.

(She sings "Lucky Star" by Madonna. "You must be my lucky star. Cause you shine on my wherever you are")

I tell everybody at school I'm going to be a star. If I say I'm going to be a star and I don't become one does that mean I'm lying?

You know the definition of lying? I looked it up once. It means "the telling of lies, or false statements. Untruthfulness. A false statement made with deliberate intent to deceive."

(She presses play on radio. SOUND: Georgia by Ray Charles plays. She dances a childish but graceful dance offstage while lights fade.) BLACKOUT.

WORKS CITED

- “Definition of Situation” https://www.google.com/search?sourceid=navclient&ie=UTF-8&rlz=1T4SKPB_enUS393US394&q=situation Google, Web. March 15, 2012
- “Definition of Lying” <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/lying> Google, Web. March 15, 2012